

Dead Bird “Condition” List
Revised Guidelines for Hotline Staff to Accept or Reject Carcasses
West Nile Virus and Dead Bird Hotline
Vector-Borne Disease Section
California Department of Health Services
May 15, 2007

(Always emphasize the importance of reporting!)

Alive/Sick

We are unable to collect live or sick birds for testing. Our permit only allows for the collection of dead birds, squirrels, and rabbits. If the caller is reporting a sick bird, tell the caller that we can only collect dead birds for testing and that if the bird is still on their property when it dies, to use a shovel or gloves to place the bird into a plastic bag and then call the hotline back. Give the caller the Report ID and ask them to refer to this ID when calling back.

Note: If the caller is looking for help for a sick or injured animal, look in the County files for a local Wildlife Rehabilitation facility. Tell the caller that if the facility is not able to collect the bird, to call the hotline back after the bird has died.

Do not ever instruct a caller to kill a bird. If the caller asks if they should kill the bird, tell them that we cannot advise them to do this.

Ants

We accept birds for testing with ants on them, unless the bird is covered with hundreds of ants. If the bird is covered with hundreds of ants, list the Condition of the bird as “Ants”. Tell the caller that the bird will not be collected for testing because it is infested with ants. If asked why it is rejected because of ants, tell the caller that an abundance of ants indicate that the bird has probably been dead for longer than 24 hours and it makes it difficult for the laboratory to do the testing .

Closed Zip Code

If the Submission Status for a zip code is listed as “Reject All,” “Reject All Until (date),” or “No Service to Area,” the local agency is not collecting birds from that zip code for testing (which means that WNV has already been detected in that county).

However, as long as the zip code Submission Status does not state “No Salvage” and the dead bird meets the criteria for testing, you may ask the caller if they would be willing to double-bag the bird and drop it off at their local agency (see the *Public Salvage* section of the Hotline Protocol for further instructions).

Otherwise, for all birds reported from these zip codes, list the bird Condition as “Closed Zip Code”. Inform the caller that the local agency is not collecting birds from their area at this time because they are in the field controlling mosquitoes, but that you will make a report for the bird and its location will be used to identify and track WNV activity in the region. Let them know that reports of dead birds – regardless of the birds being tested – are very important and will be used in our surveillance program, and thank them for their call.

Dead Less Than 24 Hours (Non-Corvids)

For birds that are suitable for testing, list the Condition of the bird as “Dead Less than 24 Hours” and change the Bird Status to “Submitted”. (See the *Submitting a Bird* section of the Hotline Protocol for further instructions)

Dead Less Than 48 Hours (Corvids)

Corvids (American Crows, Common Ravens, Yellow-billed Magpies, Steller’s Jays, and Western Scrub-Jays) can be submitted up to 48 hours after death. For corvids suitable for testing that are between 24 and 48 hours old, list the Condition as “Dead Less than 48 Hours” and change the Bird Status to “Submitted”. (See the *Submitting a Bird* section of the Hotline Protocol for further instructions). For all other species that are dead for more than 24 hours, list the Condition as “Dead Too Long”.

Dead Too Long

We can only collect birds that are dead less than 24 hours as after this time the virus starts to degrade and can no longer be detected. We ask callers a series of questions about the bird to try to determine if it meets this requirement for testing (see Condition Questions in *The Phone Call* section of the Hotline Protocol). If the caller indicates any of the following, list the Condition as “Dead Too Long”:

- the bird was found more than 24 hours ago
- the eyes of the bird are sunken or missing
- the bird appears to be rotting
- the bird appears to be dried out
- the bird will be more than 24 hours old before it could be collected (i.e., a caller is reporting a bird at 4 pm that they first saw the previous day)

Tell the caller that we will not be able to collect the bird for testing because it has been dead for too long and that we need to submit birds within 24 hours after they die.

Disappeared/Disposed Of

If a caller indicates that the bird they are reporting has disappeared or that they have already disposed of the bird, list the Condition of the bird as “Disappeared/Disposed of”. Also use this condition for birds that have been buried. For birds that have been disposed of, tell the caller to leave the bird in their trash can and that you will make a report of the bird.

Note: Do not tell callers to bury birds. If a caller asks if it is okay to bury a bird, tell them that it is better to use a shovel or gloves to place the bird into a plastic bag and dispose of it in an outside garbage can. (The problem with burying a bird is that the caller probably wouldn't bury it deep enough and it could be dug up by some animal; thus we have to tell them the above.)

Frozen

If a caller has a bird that they have put in their freezer, ask about the condition of the bird before it was frozen (See Condition Questions in *The Phone Call* section of the Hotline Protocol). If the bird was suitable before it was frozen, submit the bird for testing and list the condition of the bird as "Frozen." (See the *Submitting a Bird* section of the Hotline Protocol for further instructions) In the date field, indicate the date that the bird was found. Tell the caller to remove the bird from the freezer and leave it on their front porch for collection. If the bird was not suitable for testing before it was frozen (i.e. dead more than 24 hours), inform the caller that you have made a report about the bird, but that it can be disposed of in an outside garbage can.

Note: Never tell a caller to put a dead bird in their freezer or refrigerator. If it is extremely warm outside or the bird is being collected the following day, instruct the caller to place the bagged bird in a bucket of ice and/or leave the bird in a shaded area.

In Public Area

We can only collect birds that are in secure locations. If the bird is in a public area (a park, in the street, on the sidewalk, near a freeway, in a parking lot, etc.), you can ask the caller if they are willing to collect the bird and bring it back to their residence or business. Do not ask callers to go into busy streets to collect birds. If they are unwilling or unable to collect the bird, list the Condition of the bird as "In Public Area". Tell the caller that you will make a report about the bird, but that we can only collect birds that are in secure locations where we can be sure that the bird will not be disposed of by another person, dragged off by an animal, or run over by a vehicle. We don't want to waste the local agency's time to collect a bird that ends up not being there or is untestable.

Maggots

We accept birds for testing with a few maggots on them, but not birds that are covered with maggots (i.e. on more than 25% of the bird's body). If the bird is covered with maggots, list the Condition of the bird as "Maggots". Tell the caller that if a bird is covered in maggots it indicates that the bird has been dead too long for testing. The maggots have destroyed the kidneys which is the organ tested by the laboratory.

Run Over

We cannot collect birds that are found in the street that have been run over. List the Condition of the bird as "Run Over". Tell the caller that birds that have been run over are not suitable for testing.

Someone Else's Residence

We cannot collect birds that are not at the caller's residence as we cannot go onto private property without permission from the property owner. If a caller is reporting a bird on a neighbor's property, list the Condition of the bird as "Someone Else's Residence". Tell the caller to give our number to their neighbor so that they can call in the bird. You can also tell the caller that if they get permission from the property owner to go onto their property, that they can then collect the bird and bring in back to their residence. **Do not tell a caller to go onto someone else's property without first getting permission from the property owner.**

Species Not Accepted

If a caller is reporting a bird that does not meet the local agency species requirements, list the bird Condition as "Species Not Accepted". The Submission Status for a zip code, which is on the Webform, will indicate any species restrictions for that area (i.e. "No Doves", "Corvids Only", or "Corvids and Raptors Only"). Tell the caller that you will make a report of the bird – which will be used to identify and track WNV activity in the region – but that their local agency is not collecting that type of bird at this time. Also let the caller know which species are being collected in their area.

Unknown

If the caller does not know the condition of the bird and is not able to look at it on the phone with you or a caller does not indicate the condition of the bird on an internet report or voicemail, list the Condition as "Unknown". Give the caller the Report ID number for their report and ask them to call the hotline back when they are able to look at the bird. If the caller is not willing or able to do this, tell the caller that we cannot pick up birds without knowing if they are suitable for testing, so it will be entered as a report but will not be collected.

Weekend Report/Holiday

We are not able to collect birds that are called in to the hotline on Friday afternoons, Saturdays, and Sunday mornings because the birds will be dead for more than 24 hours before they could be collected on Monday morning. None of the local agencies collect birds on weekends. For birds reported during these times, list the bird Condition as "Weekend Report". Tell the caller that we cannot collect the bird because it will be too old for testing by Monday, as we need to collect the bird within 24 hours after it dies.